

STATE OF VERMONT
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

Case No. 17-4999-INV

Investigation into Commission Rule 3.300, Disconnection of Residential Electric, Gas and Water Service; Commission Rule 3.200, Ratepayer Deposits for Gas, Electric, and Water Service); and Commission Rule 3.400, Disconnection of Cable Television Service and Non-Residential Electric, Gas and Water Service	
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Case No. 24-1079-RULE

Proposed revisions to Vermont Public Utility Commission Rule 3.300	
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Case No. 24-1080-RULE

Proposed revisions to Vermont Public Utility Commission Rule 3.400	
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Order entered: 08/01/2024

**ORDER RE AMENDMENTS TO BE FILED WITH
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATIVE RULES**

I. INTRODUCTION

In this Order, the Vermont Public Utility Commission (“Commission”) addresses comments filed on the Commission’s proposed amendments to Commission Rules 3.300 and 3.400. The Commission also notifies the participants to these proceedings that the Commission will file its final proposed amendments to Rules 3.300 and 3.400 with the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (“LCAR”). Redlined and clean copies of the Commission’s proposed rule filings with LCAR will also be uploaded to ePUC together with this order.

II. BACKGROUND

Case No. 17-4999-INV was initially opened by the Commission on November 22, 2017, with the intent of exploring issues and concerns related to Commission Rule 3.300, which governs the disconnection of residential electric, gas, and water services. The Commission

solicited comments from the Vermont Department of Public Service (the “Department”), affected utilities, various non-profit organizations, and other interested parties. The Commission subsequently received numerous rounds of written comments and proposed rule drafts from interested parties and expanded the scope of this proceeding to include Commission Rule 3.400, which governs the disconnection process for cable television and non-residential electric, gas, and water service. The Commission held multiple workshops leading to the consideration of a draft rule proposed by the Department that would have significantly overhauled Rules 3.300 and 3.400.

However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated an immediate change to the utility disconnection process. The Commission issued a series of emergency orders that affected the requirements and obligations for utility disconnections, including a temporary moratorium on all utility disconnections.¹ The Commission also promulgated a series of emergency rules that temporarily superseded some requirements from Commission Rules 3.300 and 3.400 to reflect the realities of the pandemic response. During the emergency rules’ operation, this proceeding was suspended.

In the fall of 2022, as the Commission’s pandemic-related emergency disconnection orders and rules were set to expire, the Commission re-started this proceeding and solicited comments from the participants about how their experiences of operating under the emergency disconnection rules could provide helpful context and data for permanent revisions to Rules 3.300 and 3.400. The Department submitted an updated draft of the proposed overhaul of Rules 3.300 and 3.400, which led to additional rounds of written comments among the participants.

Then, in the spring of 2023, the Legislature enacted Act 47, which included a requirement that the Commission amend its rules to: (1) allow utilities to disconnect service remotely and (2) require utilities to provide notice to the property owner of residential or non-residential rental property if utility service to the property has been disconnected.²

¹ See *Vermont Legal Aid request for moratorium on utility and telecommunications shutoffs during State of Emergency*, Case No. 20-0703-PET, Orders of 3/18/20, 4/23/20, 5/28/20, 7/30/20, 9/23/20, 10/8/20, 12/22/20, and 6/4/21.

² Public Act No. 47, § 25a (2023 Vt., Bien. Sess.).

Following the enactment of Act 47, the Commission held a workshop and solicited additional comments from the participants. The workshop was attended by the Department and representatives of:

- Vermont Gas Systems, Inc.;
- Green Mountain Power Corporation (“GMP”);
- Vermont Public Power Supply Authority;
- Vermont Electric Cooperative (“VEC”);
- Washington Electric Cooperative (“WEC”);
- City of Burlington Electric Department (“Burlington Electric”);
- Hyde Park Electric;
- Swanton Village, Inc. Electric Department;
- Village of Morrisville Water and Light Department;
- Stowe Electric Department;
- Village of Enosburg Falls, Inc. Electric Light Department;
- Barton Village, Inc. Electric Department;
- Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (“VPPSA”); and
- Comcast of Connecticut/Georgia/Massachusetts/New Hampshire/New York/North Carolina/Virginia/Vermont, LLC (“Comcast”).

Following the workshop, on December 15, 2023, the Department filed with the Commission proposed revisions to Commission Rules 3.300 and 3.400 that would implement the requirements of Act 47. The Department also commented that it “intends these proposals to be interim changes and strongly recommends that further comprehensive revisions to the rules . . . be finalized after those required by Act 47.”³

GMP, VEC, WEC, and Burlington Electric filed comments in response to the Department’s proposed rule amendments. The commenters supported most of the Department’s proposed rule amendments, though they highlighted several areas of disagreement and concern. The Department filed a reply to the utilities’ comments and made additional revisions to its proposed rule amendments.

³ Department’s December 15, 2023, Comments at 2.

On February 5, 2024, the Commission issued an order in Case No. 17-4999-INV addressing the participants' numerous written comments. The Commission also circulated drafts of the proposed revisions to Rules 3.300 and 3.400 and informed the participants that it intended to start the formal rulemaking process for the rule amendments required by Act 47 under the Vermont Administrative Procedures Act. The Commission explained that this was an interim rulemaking to implement the changes in Act 47.

On February 8, 2024, the Commission submitted its rulemaking documents to the Interagency Committee on Administrative Rules ("ICAR") to revise Rules 3.300 and 3.400 and opened Case Nos. 24-1079-RULE and 24-1080-RULE for the formal rulemaking proceedings.

On February 23, 2024, ICAR completed its review of the Commission's proposed revisions to Rules 3.300 and 3.400.

On April 12, 2024, the Commission filed its proposed revisions to Rules 3.300 and 3.400 with the Vermont Secretary of State.

On May 21, 2024, Comcast filed comments on the proposed amendments to Rule 3.400.

On May 22, 2024, the Commission held a remote public hearing for the proposed rule amendments. The public hearing was attended by representatives of the Department and various public utilities, but the Commission did not receive any comments from members of the public during the hearing.

On May 31, 2024, the Department, VEC, and VPPSA filed comments on the proposed rule amendments.

III. DISCUSSION OF COMMENTS

As noted above, the Commission received written comments from the Department, VEC, VPPSA, and Comcast in response to the proposed amendments to Rules 3.300 and 3.400 that were filed with the Vermont Secretary of State. The participants' comments are addressed below.

Department

- (i) Rules 3.301(C) and 3.401(C) (Definition of "Delinquency")

The Department recommends that the Commission revise the definition of “Delinquency” included in Sections 3.301(C) and 3.401(C) of the proposed rules. Specifically, the Department recommends that the Commission adopt the following definition for the term “Delinquency”:

Failure of the customer to tender payment for a valid bill within thirty days from the verifiable transmittal of the bill. The “due date” must be printed on the bill. Should the utility intend to have failure to tender payment by the “due date” establish delinquency instead, the “due date” must be at least 30 days from transmittal of the bill.

The Department states that this proposed definition will better align with current utility practices and the capabilities of the utilities’ billing methods and software. The Department also states that compliance with the definition of “Delinquency” that was included in the proposed rule filed with the Secretary of State may cause some utilities to incur unnecessary, additional expense as a result of having to change their billing capabilities. The Department further represents that its proposed definition is based on conversations and feedback that it received from affected utilities.

We agree that the Department’s proposed new definition for the term “Delinquency” is preferable to the definition that we included in our initial proposed rule revisions. We recognize that this definition is better aligned with current utility practices and will reduce potential compliance costs for affected utilities without affecting the underlying substance of the proposed rule. Therefore, we will adopt the Department’s proposed definition of “Delinquency” and revise our proposed amendments to Rules 3.300 and 3.400 accordingly. We have, however, made some minor changes to the language in the final sentence of the definition to improve the clarity of the definition. Our final sentence of the definition will read “[s]hould the utility instead choose to establish delinquency as failure to tender payment by the ‘due date,’ that ‘due date’ must be at least 30 days from transmittal of the bill.”

VEC

(i) Rule 3.302(C)(1)(a) (Retention of contact information)

VEC requests that we change our proposed amendment to Rule 3.302(C)(1)(a) to remove a redundant requirement regarding the utilities’ obligation to retain property owners’ contact information. We agree with VEC that the first sentence in Rule 3.302(C)(1)(a) is superfluous.

Therefore, we have removed this sentence in our proposed rule amendment. We have also made the corresponding change to Rule 3.402(D)(1).

(ii) Rule 3.302(C)(3) (Written follow-up notice)

VEC recommends that the Commission remove the requirement from proposed Rule 3.302(C)(3) that utilities must provide a follow-up written notice of disconnection of services within two business days (if a landlord requests to receive written notice). VEC argues that this requirement adds unnecessary cost and workload.

The Commission addressed and responded to this same issue in its February 5, 2024, order. As we noted in that order, this requirement will apply only if there is an express request from the property owner. We also clarified that the utilities may impose a reasonable fee to recover any cost associated with the notice. VEC has not presented any new or additional information that causes us to reconsider our previous determination on this section of the proposed rule. Therefore, we will not adopt VEC's requested change to proposed Rule 3.302(C)(3).

(iii) Rule 3.303(F) (Prohibition on fees for remote disconnections)

VEC states that it continues to oppose the prohibition on utilities collecting fees for remote disconnections that is included in proposed Rule 3.303. The Commission addressed this issue in detail in its February 5, 2024, order. VEC has not presented any new or additional information that would cause us to reconsider our previous determination on this issue. Therefore, we decline to remove the provision from proposed Rule 3.303 that states that "no fees may be charged for remote disconnections."

(iv) Rule 3.304 (Notification and timeframes for winter disconnections)

VEC requests that the Commission change the initial notification timeframe in proposed Rule 3.304(A) from 72 hours to 96 hours. VEC asserts that this proposed revision will provide an opportunity for earlier notice to its affected members. VEC also requests several changes to the language included in proposed Rules 3.304(A) and (B) regarding the sequencing of notices that must be provided to customers under these sections of the rule.

We find VEC's request to be reasonable and likely in the best interests of affected customers. Therefore, we have revised proposed Rule 3.304(A) to include a 96-hour

requirement. We have also made revisions to proposed Rules 3.304(A) and (B) to clean up and clarify the sequencing of the required notices.

VPPSA

(i) Rules 3.301(C) and 3.401(C) (Definition of “Delinquency”)

VPPSA requests that the Commission revise the definition of “Delinquency” included in proposed Rule 3.301(C). As discussed above, we have decided to adopt the Department’s proposed language for the definition of “Delinquency.” Although the Department’s proposed language does not perfectly overlap with VPPSA’s definition, we find that the Department’s proposal addresses many of the issues identified by VPPSA in its comments, including issues regarding billing software, postmarks, and electronic transmittal.

(ii) Rule 3.302 (Notice to landlords)

VPPSA recommends that the Commission limit the required landlord notice to the winter disconnection period. In support of this request, VPPSA states that the underlying intent of Act 47 and the proposed landlord notice requirements are grounded in safety and the protection of property and tenants. VPPSA asserts that it “can be reasonably inferred the property owner notice is most applicable during the heating months when severe temperatures can create substantial plumbing or structural damage from loss of heat, particularly where only electric heating systems exist.”⁴ Based on this argument, VPPSA proposes that the Commission limit the landlord notice requirements to the winter disconnection period.

We decline to adopt VPPSA’s proposed limitation on the landlord notification. First, we find that limiting this requirement to only the heating season may be cumbersome to implement and create potential confusion for affected property owners. Second, although the risk of property damage from loss of electricity may be most acute during winter months, we recognize that damage or harm could also result from loss of electric service during warmer months. For example, sump pumps, security systems, and most modern telephonic equipment may not function without electric service. We also do not find that Act 47 so limited this requirement. Accordingly, we decline to adopt VPPSA’s recommend revision to this section of the rule.

⁴ VPPSA’s May 31, 2024, Comments at 5.

(iii) Rule 3.302(C)(2)(a) (Allowable disclosures)

VPPSA raises general concerns about data privacy and consumer protection in relation to the landlord notification requirements included in proposed Rule 3.302(C)(2)(a), which provides that the landlord notice “must not include any personally identifiable information about the tenant at the disconnected location, or the tenant’s account if the tenant is the customer, except that the utility may disclose information necessary to enable the property owner or other applicable third party to reconnect utility service to the property.”

With respect to this provision, VPPSA does not propose any recommended changes. Instead, it requests that the Commission “leave no room for ambiguity on what does and does not constitute PII under these rule revisions and explicitly define the boundaries of allowable information to be disclosed by the utility to a landlord or property owner.”⁵

We share VPPSA’s concerns about privacy and protecting personally identifiable information. We note that proposed Rule 3.302(C)(2)(a) expressly prohibits the utilities from including any personally identifiable information regarding the tenant in a notice to the landlord. We feel that the proposed rule, as written, achieves a necessary degree of privacy protection while still implementing Act 47’s underlying mandate. Our expectation, which is expressly built into the rule as an unambiguous requirement, is that utilities will not disclose tenants’ personally identifiable information to landlords.

Because the landlord notification process is a new requirement, and we recognize that there is a diverse array of rental properties throughout Vermont, we find that it would be counter-productive to implement a proscriptive list of actions that can be taken to allow for proper landlord notification. However, after gaining more experience with this process, the Commission will plan to revisit this issue in future amendments to Rule 3.300.

(iv) Rule 3.308 (Timing of implementation)

VPPSA also raises concerns about the feasibility of the proposed implementation deadlines included in proposed Rule 3.308. VPPSA states that adopting and adhering to the new processes included in proposed Rules 3.300 and 3.400 will require outreach and engagement plans as well as communications with property owners. VPPSA also states that the new

⁵ *Id.* at 6.

requirements may require time-consuming upgrades to its customer information and billing software systems. VPPSA, therefore, requests that the Commission extend the timeline for implementing the requirements of Rule 3.300 and 3.400, though VPPSA does not propose a specific extension.

Proposed Rules 3.308 and 3.406, as filed with the Secretary of State, require utilities to file updated disconnection forms and necessary tariffs within 30 days of the effective date of the rules. In light of VPPSA's comments, we have decided to extend this deadline to 60 days. Consistent with Commission Rule 2.107,⁶ we have also added new paragraphs to both proposed rules that will allow utilities to petition the Commission for extensions of the deadlines for filing revised disconnection notices and tariffs if necessary "[t]o prevent unnecessary hardship or delay, to prevent injustice, or for other good cause."

Comcast

In its comments, Comcast highlights that Section 25a(b) of Act 47 limits the definition of "utility service" to gas, electric, water, and wastewater service subject to the jurisdiction of the Commission. Comcast, therefore, requests that cable television providers be exempted from the proposed landlord notification requirements that would be included in Rule 3.400. In its comments, the Department stated that it did not object to Comcast's comments and request for cable companies to be exempt from the landlord notification requirements.

We agree with Comcast that cable television providers were not included within Act 47's mandates. Therefore, we have revised our proposed revisions to Rule 3.400 to include a new Section 3.407 that exempts cable television providers from the landlord notification requirements.

IV. CONCLUSION

We appreciate the thoughtful and insightful comments that we have received from the Department, utilities, and other participants throughout this extended rulemaking investigation. The Commission will upload final copies of all materials filed with LCAR in ePUC and keep

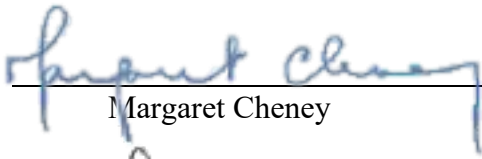
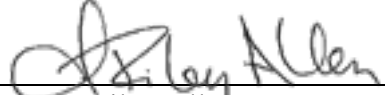
⁶ Commission Rule 2.107 provides that "[t]o prevent unnecessary hardship or delay, to prevent injustice, or for other good cause, the Commission may waive the application of a rule under such conditions as it may require, unless precluded by the rule or by statute."

participants updated on the final elements of the rulemaking process for the proposed amendments to Rules 3.300 and 3.400.

We also note that the Department's cover letter to its May 31, 2024, comments recommends that the Commission withhold opening a follow-on proceeding to consider more comprehensive revisions to Rules 3.300 and 3.400 that were recommended by various participants to this proceeding. The Department states that after receiving feedback from affected parties, the Commission should defer opening a new rulemaking proceeding until after the utilities and other affected entities gain meaningful experience from implementing the Act 47 rule changes. We agree with the Department's recommendation, and therefore will withhold opening a follow-on rulemaking until after the utilities and other affected entities have more experience implementing the Act 47 requirements.

SO ORDERED.

Dated at Montpelier, Vermont, this 1st day of August, 2024.

	)	
Edward McNamara	)	PUBLIC UTILITY
	)	
	)	COMMISSION
Margaret Cheney	)	
	)	
	)	OF VERMONT
J. Riley Allen	)	

OFFICE OF THE CLERK

Filed: August 1, 2024

Attest: 
Clerk of the Commission

Notice to Readers: This decision is subject to revision of technical errors. Readers are requested to notify the Clerk of the Commission (by e-mail, telephone, or in writing) of any apparent errors, in order that any necessary corrections may be made. (E-mail address: puc.clerk@vermont.gov)

3.300 DISCONNECTION OF RESIDENTIAL GAS, ELECTRIC, AND WATER SERVICE**3.301 Definitions**

For the purposes of this rule, the following definitions apply:

- (A) Aggregate Data: Customer account information from which all identifying information has been removed such that the data or information cannot be associated with a given customer without extraordinary effort.
- (B) Business Days: Monday through Thursday, excluding Vermont legal holidays and any other day, when the company's business offices are not open to the public, and any day preceding a day the company's business offices are not open to the public.
- (C) Delinquency: Failure of the customer to tender payment for a valid bill within 30 days from the verifiable transmittal of the bill. The "due date" must be printed on the bill. Should the utility intend to have failure to tender payment by the "due date" establish delinquency instead, the "due date" must be at least 30 days from transmittal of the bill.
- (D) Disconnection: The serving utility's intentional termination of a customer's utility service by any methods such as remotely via advanced metering infrastructure or physically on premises or at the pole. Disconnection includes interruption or limitation of service but does not include cessation of service made at the request of or with the permission of the customer or interruptions of service that are necessary for maintenance or repairs conducted by the utility.
- (E) Notice: Written notice of disconnection that is delivered to the customer on a form approved by the Commission, except where otherwise provided, or by electronic notice, mailed or electronically transmitted within 40 days after delinquency but not more than 20 days, nor less than 14 days before the first date on which disconnection of service, whether remote or on premises, may occur. If payment has been made by a check or other instrument that is subsequently dishonored, then the number of days between delivery to the utility of the dishonored instrument and receipt by the utility of the notice of dishonor may be deducted from the minimum number of days before disconnection that notice must be sent, but in no event may that minimum number of days be less than four.
- (F) Payment of a bill: Receipt at the company's business office or authorized payment agency of cash or of a check or other instrument that is subsequently honored.
- (G) Physician's Certificate: A written statement by a duly licensed physician certifying that a customer or resident within the customer's household would suffer an immediate and serious health hazard due to the disconnection of utility service, or by failure to reconnect service, to that household. The certificate will be valid for 30 days, or the duration of the hazard, whichever is less, and may be renewed once. Use of a physician's certificate by a customer to prevent disconnection or to cause a reconnection is limited to two consecutive 30-day periods and must not exceed three 30-day periods in any calendar year, except

upon written order of the Commission.

- (H) Transmit: An act of the utility to convey any document, bill, or notice to a customer. Transmittal may be accomplished through verifiable means such as postal mail, in-person visits, or electronic transfer. Electronic transfer may include email, text message, app click-through, and other routine electronic message platforms.

3.302 General Rule

Except at the request of the customer or upon order of the Commission, no utility may disconnect residential service of gas, electric, or water unless payment of a valid bill or charge is delinquent and notice of disconnection has been furnished to the customer, as provided in this rule.

- (A) Disconnections for Health or Safety Reasons. This rule does not apply to any disconnection or interruption of service made necessary for reasons of health or safety of the customer or the general public.
- (B) Exceptions. The following exceptions do not apply to payment(s) of deposits, but must apply to the general rule of this section. Disconnection is not permitted if:
- (1) the company bills at least as frequently as once every two months, and the delinquent bill or charge, or aggregate delinquent bills and charges, do not exceed \$50.00, provided that this exception may not be used for more than two billing cycles in one calendar year;
 - (2) the only charges or bills constituting the delinquency are more than two years old;
 - (3) the delinquency is due solely to a disputed portion of a charge that has been referred to the Commission by the customer or the company, and the Commission has advised the company not to disconnect service;
 - (4) the delinquency is due to a failure to pay a line extension, special construction charge, or other non-recurring charge except that this exception does not apply to reconnection charges, or charges for personal visits to collect delinquent accounts;
 - (5) the disconnection would represent an immediate and serious hazard to the health of the customer or a resident within the customer's household, as set forth in a physician's certificate furnished to the company. (Notice by telephone or otherwise that such certificate will be forthcoming will have the effect of receipt, provided that the certificate is in fact received within seven days.); or
 - (6) the customer has not been given an opportunity to enter into (a) a reasonable repayment plan or, having entered into such a plan, has substantially abided by its terms in accordance with Section 3.305 (A); and (b) in the case of gas and electric utilities, a monthly installment plan for the payment of future bills.
- (C) Disconnection of Rental Units. If a customer requests that service be disconnected, the electric, gas, or water company must ask whether a tenant resides in the dwelling unit. An electric, water, or gas company may not disconnect a dwelling unit at the request of a lessor, owner, or agent ("landlord") or because the landlord (as a customer) has failed to pay an overdue amount, if it

has reason to believe the dwelling is rented and unless the utility gives notice as described below.

A company must make every reasonable attempt with respect to each potentially affected dwelling unit to deliver a notice three days before the scheduled disconnection to at least one adult occupant of that dwelling unit or mail a notice to the tenant of that dwelling unit. In buildings where service to two or more units is to be disconnected because of a landlord's request or non-payment, the utility must also post the notice in a secure and obvious place in the affected building or buildings.

The notice must, in addition to the applicable disclosures of Section 3.303, inform the tenant how service can be continued. Notwithstanding the provisions of Section 3.301(C), a disconnection notice containing a newly established disconnection date must be provided to the tenant at least ten days before the newly established disconnection date. If the disconnection is due to the failure of the landlord to pay an overdue amount, the landlord must be responsible for usage during the additional ten-day notice period.

A utility must offer the tenant the opportunity either to obtain service in the tenant's name or to otherwise assume responsibility for further payment. If the building has a single master meter for the whole building, the utility must make arrangements where possible to provide individual meters to separate dwelling units.

Where the wiring and metering arrangements allow, the utility must provide service upon request of the tenant. The utility may not require the tenant to pay any of the bill owed to the utility by the landlord.

If the utility disconnects a household because it is not aware that the household is occupied by the tenant, and the landlord is responsible for payment of the utility bill, the utility must reinstate service upon notification from the tenant. Under such circumstances, the utility may not require advance payment of any deposit, and the customer must have the option of paying the deposit, if required, in three equal payments, with one-third due in 15 days, one-third due in 30 days, and one-third due in 60 days.

- (1) A utility must provide notice to the property owner of residential rental property if utility service to the property has been disconnected, even if the tenant is the customer, for the purpose of promoting safety, the protection of property, and aid to tenants.
 - (a) Property owners must contact the utility to provide their contact information, and it is the property owner's responsibility to contact the utility to maintain up-to-date contact information. Utilities must retain contact information provided by property owners of residential rental locations.
 - (b) Property owners may authorize an appropriate third-party representative for notice and provide such contact information as the utility deems necessary. However, utilities may not impose any significant paperwork

burden. A utility may reasonably request proof of ownership such as a copy of a deed or tax bill if the property owner is not otherwise known to the utility.

- (2) A utility must provide notice to a property owner once by phone, text, or email before 3:00 p.m. on the day of disconnection of gas, electric, or water service to any residential property for which the property owner has provided contact information for such purposes.
 - (a) The notice must not include any personally identifiable information about the tenant at the disconnected location, or the tenant's account if the tenant is the customer, except that the utility may disclose information necessary to enable the property owner or other applicable third party to reconnect utility service to the property.
 - (b) A utility may not disclose, sell, or transfer any personally identifying individual or aggregate data to a landlord or third-party property manager without the consent of the customer, unless otherwise provided for by law.
 - (c) Customer information that is specifically prohibited from disclosure includes customer names, telephone numbers, personally identifying electricity or gas account numbers, usage, and personally identifying payment history.
- (3) A follow-up written notice of disconnection of service(s) must be mailed to the property owner of any residential unit property within two business days of disconnection of gas, electric, or water service if the property owner and/or property manager has provided contact information and has requested written notice. This notice requirement may be satisfied if the utility contacts the property owner by phone or electronically via email or SMS text message if the property owner consents to electronic delivery. The written notice must include:
 - (a) The title of a utility representative with whom the property owner may make an inquiry or complaint. The contact information and business hours of the company representative(s) must also be included.
 - (b) The address, telephone numbers (including the toll-free number), website, email address, and business hours for the Department of Public Service, Consumer Affairs and Public Information Division ("CAPI"). A statement must be included which explains that CAPI can help customers negotiate with utilities or assist with filing a dispute with the Public Utility Commission.
 - (c) The itemized fees that may be charged to the property owner for the restoration of service. If a deposit may be required for restoration of service, then the utility must provide an explanation of how the amount will be calculated.
 - (d) The notice provided pursuant to subparagraph (2) above must inform the

property owner of the option to receive a follow-up written notice and that the additional notice may be subject to a reasonable fee.

- (D) Budget Billing Plans. Each gas and electric utility must offer budget payment plans to a customer at a primary residence, as defined in PUC Rule 3.201 in accordance with the following:
- (1) The plan must be designed to reduce fluctuations in the customer's bills due to seasonal patterns of consumption and seasonal rates.
 - (2) A customer may elect to participate in the budget billing plan at any time of year. A budget payment plan must be based on the customer's recent 12-month consumption, adjusted for known changes, including anticipated length of occupancy. If 12 months of billing data are not available for the customer, then 12 months of billing data for the premises must be used. If 12 months of billing data are not available for the premises, then the utility must estimate the future consumption over the next 12-month period. Each plan must ensure that bills clearly identify consumption and state the amounts that would be due without budget billing.
 - (3) The monthly payment due must not exceed one-twelfth of the annual estimated bill, or the estimated average monthly amount for customers who expect to be in a dwelling for less than one year, as defined in subsection (D) (2) of this section. Between three and six months after the payment plan is initiated, the utility must compare the payment plan bill with projected energy consumption and must make adjustments necessary to minimize under- or over-payment by the customer. Between six and nine months after the payment plan is initiated, the utility may compare the payment plan with the projected energy consumption and if the difference exceeds 10% of the estimated annual consumption, the utility may adjust the monthly payment amount. Additionally, the utility must reconcile a customer's budget payment plan 12 months after initiating the customer's plan and annually thereafter either on the anniversary of the initiation of the plan or at a set time of the year as filed in the utility's tariff. If the amount of the deficit exceeds \$50.00, the customer must have the option of paying any budget plan deficit in 12 equal monthly installments during the ensuing 12 months.
 - (4) Any customer who applies for the plan and has a delinquent balance must have the right to pay the delinquency in an extended repayment plan concurrent with the budget plan.
 - (5) Any customer who applies for budget billing must be informed in writing that any disputed terms or conditions for such a billing plan may be referred to the Consumer Affairs Division of the Department of Public Service. Notice to the customer must include the division's address and toll-free number.
- (E) Equal Treatment of Payments. A company must treat all payments made by any person including the customer in the same manner unless the utility receives instructions to the contrary. Payments must be applied toward the delinquent portion of the account before being applied to the current bill unless written instructions from the customer, a disputed bill, or payment arrangements require otherwise.
- (F) Household Rule. A company must not disconnect or refuse service to a customer due to a delinquent bill owed by another person unless a person owing

a delinquent bill, resulting from service to that household, resides in the same household.

- (G) Establishment of a Reasonable Repayment Plan. When establishing a reasonable repayment plan, the company must consider the income and income schedule of the customer, if offered by the customer, the customer's payment history, the size of the arrearage and current bill, the amount of time and reason for the outstanding bill, and whether the delinquency was caused by unforeseen circumstances.

3.303 Disconnection Notice Form

The notice form required under Section 3.302 and defined in Section 3.301 must contain the following information:

- (A) a statement that the customer's account is delinquent, a statement of the amount of the delinquency, and a statement that service will be disconnected unless:
- (1) the delinquency is paid in full by a certain date; or
 - (2) the customer enters into a reasonable agreement with the utility to pay the delinquency by means of a repayment plan; or
 - (3) the customer denies the existence of any delinquency in excess of \$50.00, submits the dispute to the Commission, and the Commission advises the utility not to disconnect service; or
 - (4) the customer presents to the utility (or gives actual notice that he or she will, within seven days, present to the utility) a statement from a duly licensed physician certifying that disconnection will result in an immediate and serious health hazard to the customer or to a resident within the customer's household, provided that use of a physician's certificate to prevent disconnection or to cause a reconnection is limited to two consecutive 30-day periods and must not exceed three 30-day periods in any calendar year, except upon written order of the Commission;
- (B) the dates and times of day when the utility may disconnect service if the customer does not take appropriate action as described above;
- (C) a statement that the utility will negotiate a reasonable agreement for payment of the delinquency by means of a repayment plan and that if, after entering such negotiations, the customer does not believe the utility's terms to be reasonable, the customer may request the assistance of the Consumer Affairs Division of the Department of Public Service in conducting further negotiations;
- (D) the positions, addresses, telephone numbers, and business hours of the company representatives with whom the customer may make any inquiry or complaint, and a statement that telephone calls made from within Vermont for such purposes may be made collect or toll-free;
- (E) the address, telephone numbers, including the toll-free number, and business hours of the Consumer Affairs Division of the Department of Public Service, and a statement that, in addition to providing assistance or advice as to negotiations with utilities, the Division can provide information as to how to submit to the Commission a dispute over the existence of a delinquency;

- (F) the itemized fees that may be charged to the customer for the disconnection process, including those for notice, disconnection, collection, and restoration of service. No fees may be charged for remote disconnections. Fees may be charged for notice of disconnection to landlords or appropriate third parties, such as property managers. If a deposit may be required for restoration of service, an explanation of how the amount will be calculated must also be provided;
- (G) in the case of gas and electric utilities, if disconnection is to occur between November 1 and March 31 (inclusive), a list as annually compiled and distributed by the Department of Public Service of the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of governmental and private agencies that may provide assistance to customers in paying their utility bills;
- (H) in the case of gas and electric utilities, an offer to arrange a monthly installment plan for the payment of future bills, provided that such offer need not be made if the account is for service at premises not used as a principal residence;
- (I) in the case of gas and electric utilities, a statement that service to households with any member aged 62 or older must not be disconnected between November 1 and March 31 if outdoor temperatures are forecast to fall below 32 degrees Fahrenheit during a 48-hour period beginning at the anticipated time of disconnection, provided that the account holder furnishes advance written notice to the utility that the household qualifies under this paragraph and, if requested by the utility, furnishes reasonable proof of such qualification;
- (J) A statement that utility services may be disconnected remotely, or at the pole or premises without a visit to the premises;
- (K) A statement that the address, time, and date of disconnected utility services are reported to property owners, if the customer is not the property owner, when contact information for property owners is on file. Utilities must not use language in notices or messaging that could be construed as coercing payment by threatening to inform the landlord; and
- (L) any other information not inconsistent with the above and which has received prior approval of the Commission.

3.304 Winter Disconnections

No gas or electric utility may disconnect service to any residential customer between November 1 and March 31 (inclusive), unless, in addition to complying with all other requirements of this rule, the utility has complied with the following:

- (A) The utility must make a reasonable attempt to orally contact the customer within 96 hours in advance of any planned disconnection. The utility may use alternative forms of communication such as text or email to satisfy the notice requirement. An additional contact (phone call, email, or SMS text message) must be made within 24 hours of a pending remote disconnection. One of these contacts must be made outside of typical business hours—for example, after 5:00 p.m. or before 8:00 a.m.
 - (1) The unavailability of a customer's telephone number excuses compliance

with the requirement to attempt notification by telephone.

- (2) A telephone call to a telephone not removed from service that results in a busy signal or in any other condition preventing communication, or an unanswered call that has not been allowed to ring for at least 60 seconds, shall not count toward satisfaction of the requirement of this section.
 - (3) When oral notification is given in compliance with this paragraph, in addition to giving the information required by Section 3.303, the utility must advise the customer or other responsible adult that oral notification is not required to be given in connection with any subsequent disconnection that may occur during the same winter season, unless the utility's tariffs provide otherwise, except as required by remote disconnection. For any intended remote disconnection, even if previous oral notice has been given, the utility must make an additional contact (phone call, email, or SMS text) within 24 hours of a pending remote disconnection.
- (B) If the utility is unable to reach the customer orally or does not receive confirmation of receipt of notice sent electronically via email or SMS text, the utility must make three additional attempts to contact the customer. These three attempts must be at least three hours apart, with one of these attempts made between the hours of 5:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. Unanswered calls must be allowed to ring for at least 60 seconds. Calls resulting in a busy signal do not count as one of the three required attempts. One of these three contacts (phone call, email, or text) must be made within 24 hours of a pending remote disconnection.

If, after complying with the requirements of subparagraph (A), actual oral notification has not been given, then, at least 48 hours before disconnection is to occur, the utility must report to the Department of Public Service, in writing or by telephone, the customer's name, address and, if available, telephone number.

- (C) If the customer has been given actual oral notice during the current winter period with respect to a previous delinquency, compliance with subparagraphs (A) and (B) is not required, provided that the utility delivers or mails to the premises at which service is to be disconnected (with a copy mailed to the customer's billing address if different) a notice containing the information required by Section 3.303. Delivery is complete (1) if made by personal service, upon actual delivery to the customer at the customer's premises at least 48 hours before the disconnection, not counting Vermont holidays, and (2) in the case of notice by mail, by deposit of the notice at any United States post office, postage prepaid, at least four days before to disconnection, not counting days when the postal service does not make regular deliveries of mail. An additional contact (phone call, email, or text) must be made within 24 hours of a pending remote disconnection regardless of whether actual oral notice was given previously during the current winter period. One of these contacts must be made outside of typical business hours—for example, after 5:00 p.m. or before 8:00 a.m.
- (D) (1) Prior to disconnection during the winter period, the utility must confirm that outdoor temperatures, as predicted by a current National Weather Service (phone 802-862-2475 or on the internet at <https://www.weather.gov/btv/>) forecast for the Burlington, Vermont, area,

or by another weather service approved by the Public Utility Commission, will not drop below 10 degrees Fahrenheit during a 48-hour period beginning between 7 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. on the anticipated date of disconnection. When temperatures are forecast to fall below 10 degrees Fahrenheit during that period, the utility is prohibited from performing disconnections.

- (2) Utility service to households with any member aged 62 or older must not be disconnected during the winter period if outdoor temperatures are forecast to fall below 32 degrees Fahrenheit during a 48-hour period beginning between 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. on the anticipated date of disconnection, provided that the account holder furnishes advance written notice to the utility that the household qualifies under this paragraph. The utility may require reasonable proof of such qualification.

3.305 Notice Under Repayment Plan

- (A) Notwithstanding the provisions of 3.301(C), when a utility proposes to disconnect service because of a customer's failure to abide by the terms of a repayment plan it must deliver or mail to the address at which service is to be disconnected (with a copy mailed to the customer's billing address if different) a notice containing the information required by Sections 3.303(A)(1) and 3.303(B). If made in person, delivery must be effected at least 72 hours before disconnection; if the notice is mailed, it must be deposited in a United States post office at least five days before disconnection. In lieu of giving written notice, the utility may give notice orally, in person or by telephone, text, or email at least 72 hours prior to disconnection. Substantial compliance with a repayment plan established under Section 3.307(B) or Section 3.302(B)(6) is demonstrated if the customer has paid at least 75% of each agreed-upon payment as due.
- (B) The manner of notice provided for in subparagraph (A) will be sufficient, even in the case of disconnection by a gas or electric utility in the winter, provided that the utility has given oral notice of the information contained in Section 3.303 at the time the repayment plan was entered into and provided the terms of the repayment plan were reasonable. In addition to the requirements specified above, customers who are pending remote disconnection must be notified in writing via email or text within 48 hours of a pending remote disconnection. If a customer has not provided such contact information, a phone call must be made by utility staff within 48 hours of a pending remote disconnection. An additional contact (phone call, email, or text) must be made within 24 hours of a pending remote disconnection. One of these contacts must be made outside of typical business hours; for example, after 5:00 p.m. or before 8:00 a.m.
- (C) Disconnection resulting from failure to meet the terms of a repayment plan must occur only after the utility has issued notice in accordance with Section 3.305(A).

3.306 Time and Notice of Disconnection

Disconnection of utility service must occur only between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. of the business day when disconnected at a pole at or near the premises of the customer, specified on the notice of disconnection, or within four business days thereafter between April 1 and October 31 (inclusive), and within eight days thereafter

between November 1 and March 31 (inclusive). However, if a company has available personnel authorized to reconnect service and enter into arrangements on behalf of the utility until 8:00 p.m. of a normal business day, the utility may disconnect service between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. When service is disconnected remotely, it may only occur between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. on a scheduled date of disconnection provided in the written notice as described previously.

When service is disconnected at the premises of the customer, which includes disconnection at a pole at or near the premises of the customer, the individual making the disconnection must immediately inform a responsible adult on the premises that service has been disconnected, or if no responsible adult is then present, such individual must leave on the premises in a conspicuous and secure place a notification advising that service has been disconnected and what the customer has to do to have service restored.

3.307 Restoration of Service

- (A) If service has been disconnected, the company must restore service within 24 hours upon the customer's request when the cause for disconnection of service has been removed, when an agreement has been reached between the customer and the company regarding the dispute that led to the disconnection, or when directed to do so by the Commission.
- (B) The company must restore service if the disconnected customer pays one-half of the delinquent bill, or a lesser negotiated amount, before restoration and enters into a repayment plan to pay the balance over a minimum period of three months, except that the utility is not obligated to enter into more than two plans of this type with a particular customer within a calendar year.
- (C) Restoration of service, to the extent feasible, must be done so as to avoid charging customers for overtime rates and other abnormal expenses.
- (D) A company must not require prepayment of any non-recurring charges associated with disconnection and restoration of service as a condition of restoration of service. Such charges must be paid within 30 days unless part of a repayment agreement.
- (E) Upon receipt of a physician's certificate, as defined in Section 3.301(D), the company must reconnect service as soon as possible, but in no event longer than 24 hours.

3.308 Filing Requirements

- (A) Within 60 days after the effective date of this rule, all companies subject to its provisions must submit to the Commission for its review a copy of the disconnection notice form described in Section 3.303.
- (B) All gas, electric, and telephone utilities subject to this rule must file monthly with the Commission, on a form provided by the Commission, a statement reporting the following information regarding residential service for the previous month: the number of bills forwarded to customers, the number of disconnection notices sent, the number of actual disconnections, the number of reconnections made within 15 days of disconnection, the number of repayment plans entered into, the

number of repayment plans that were broken, and the dollar amount of delinquencies for which disconnections were made.

- (C) Companies that fail to file information required in Section 3.308(B) within six months of the month being reported are precluded from disconnecting any residential customers.
- (D) Within 60 days of the effective date of revisions to this rule, each utility must file tariff amendments to ensure that they are consistent with the provisions of this rule.
- (E) To prevent unnecessary hardship or delay, to prevent injustice, or for other good cause, companies may petition the Commission for an extension of the filing requirement deadlines included in paragraphs (A) and (D) of this section.

3.300 DISCONNECTION OF RESIDENTIAL GAS, ELECTRIC, AND WATER SERVICE

3.301 Definitions

For the purposes of this rule, the following definitions apply:

~~(A) Disconnection: deliberate interruption, limitation, or disconnection of utility service to a ratepayer by the serving utility, not including disconnection at the request of or with the permission of the ratepayer.~~

~~(A) Aggregate Data: Customer account information from which all identifying information has been removed such that the data or information cannot be associated with a given customer without extraordinary effort.~~

~~(B) Business Days: Monday through Thursday, excluding Vermont legal holidays and any other day, when the company's business offices are not open to the public, and any day preceding a day the company's business offices are not open to the public.~~

~~(B)(C) Delinquency: failure Failure of the ratepayercustomer to tender payment for a valid bill or charge (1) within 30thirty days from the verifiable transmittal of the postmark date of that bill or charge, or (2) by a ". The "due date" at least thirty days after mailing, which date shall" must be printed on the bill. Should the utility intend to have failure to tender payment by the "due date" establish delinquency instead, the "due date" must be at least 30 days from transmittal of the bill.~~

~~(D) Disconnection: The serving utility's intentional termination of a customer's utility service by any methods such as remotely via advanced metering infrastructure or physically on premises or at the pole. Disconnection includes interruption or limitation of service but does not include cessation of service made at the request of or with the permission of the customer or interruptions of service that are necessary for maintenance or repairs conducted by the utility.~~

~~(E)(E) Notice: except where otherwise provided or where the context otherwise requires, notice shall mean Written notice of disconnection that is delivered to the customer on a form approved by the Commission, except where otherwise provided, or by electronic notice, mailed or delivered electronically transmitted within forty40 days after delinquency but not more than twenty20 days, nor less than fourteen14 days prior tobefore the first date on which disconnection of service, whether remote or on premises, may occur. Where If payment has been made by a check or other instrument whichthat is subsequently dishonored, then the number of days between delivery to the utility of the dishonored instrument and receipt by the utility of the notice of dishonor may be deducted from the minimum number of days prior tobefore disconnection that notice must be sent, but in no event may that minimum number of days be less than four.~~

~~(F) Payment of a bill: Receipt at the company's business office or authorized payment agency of cash or of a check or other instrument that is subsequently honored.~~

~~(D)(G) Physician's Certificate: Aa written statement by a duly licensed physician certifying that a ratepayercustomer or resident within the ratepayer'scustomer's household would suffer an immediate and serious health hazard bydue to the disconnection of the company'sutility service, or by failure to reconnect service, to that household. The certificate will be valid for thirty30 days, or the duration of the hazard, whichever is less, and may be renewed once. Use of a physician'sphysician's certificate by a customer to prevent disconnection or to cause a reconnection is limited to two consecutive 30-day periods and shallmust not~~

exceed three 30-day periods in any calendar year, except upon written order of the Commission.

(E) Payment of a bill: receipt at the company's business office or authorized payment agency of cash or of a check or other instrument which is subsequently honored.

(F) Business Days: Monday through Thursday, excluding Vermont legal holidays and any other day, when the company's business offices are not open to the public, and any day preceding the day the company's business offices are not open to the public.

(H) Transmit: an act of the utility to convey any document, bill, or notice to a customer. Transmittal may be accomplished through verifiable means such as postal mail, in-person visits, or electronic transfer. Electronic transfer may include email, text message, app click-through, and other routine electronic message platforms.

3.302 General Rule

Except at the request of the ratepayercustomer or upon order of the Commission, no utility shall~~may~~ disconnect residential service of gas, electric, or water unless payment of a valid bill or charge is delinquent and notice of disconnection has been furnished to the ratepayercustomer, as provided in this rule.

(A) Disconnections for Health or Safety Reasons. This rule ~~shall~~does not apply to any disconnection or interruption of service made necessary for reasons of health or safety of the ratepayercustomer or the general public.

- (B) Exceptions. The following exceptions ~~shall do~~ not apply to payment(s) of deposits, but ~~shall must~~ apply to the general rule of this section. Disconnection shall is not be permitted if:
- (1) the company bills at least as frequently as once every two months, and the delinquent bill or charge, or aggregate delinquent bills and charges, do not exceed \$50.00, provided that this exception may not be used for more than two billing cycles in one calendar year;
 - (2) the only charges or bills constituting the delinquency are more than two years old;
 - (3) the delinquency is due solely to a disputed portion of a charge ~~which that~~ has been referred to the Commission by the ~~ratepayer customer~~ or the company, and the Commission has advised the company not to disconnect service;
 - (4) the delinquency is due to a failure to pay a line extension, special construction charge, or other non-recurring charge except that this exception ~~shall does~~ not apply to reconnection charges, or charges for personal visits to collect delinquent accounts;
 - (5) the disconnection would represent an immediate and serious hazard to the health of the ~~ratepayer customer~~ or a resident within the ~~ratepayer's customer's~~ household, as set forth in a ~~physician's physician's~~ certificate furnished to the company. (Notice by telephone or otherwise that such certificate will be forthcoming will have the effect of receipt, ~~providing provided that~~ the certificate is in fact received within seven days.); or
 - (6) the ~~ratepayer customer~~ has not been given an opportunity to enter into (a) a reasonable repayment plan or, having entered into such a plan, has substantially abided by its terms in accordance with Section 3.305 (A); and (b) in the case of gas and electric utilities, a monthly installment plan for the payment of future bills.
- (C) Disconnection of Rental Units. If a ~~ratepayer customer~~ requests that service be disconnected, the electric, gas or water company must ask whether a tenant resides in the dwelling ~~unit~~. An electric, water or gas company may not disconnect a dwelling unit at the request of a lessor, owner, or agent (~~("landlord")~~) or because the landlord (as a customer) has failed to pay an overdue amount, if it has reason to believe the dwelling is rented and unless the utility gives notice as described below.

A company must make every reasonable attempt with respect to each potentially affected dwelling unit to deliver a notice three days ~~prior to before~~ the scheduled disconnection to at least one adult occupant of that dwelling unit or mail a notice to the tenant of that dwelling unit. In buildings where service to two or more units is to be disconnected because of a ~~landlord's landlord's~~ request or non-payment, the utility must also post the notice in a secure and obvious place in the affected building or buildings.

The notice must, in addition to the applicable disclosures of Section 3.303, inform the tenant how service can be continued. Notwithstanding the provisions of Section 3.301(C), a disconnection notice containing a newly established disconnection date ~~shall must~~ be provided to the tenant at least ten days ~~prior to before~~ the newly established disconnection date. If the disconnection is due to the failure of the landlord to pay an overdue amount, the landlord ~~shall must~~ be responsible for usage during the additional ten-day notice period.

A utility must offer the tenant the opportunity either to obtain service in the tenant's name or to otherwise assume responsibility for further payment. If the building has a single master meter for the whole building, the utility must make arrangements

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where possible to provide individual meters to separate dwelling units.

Where the wiring and metering arrangements allow, the utility must provide service upon request of the tenant. The utility may not require the tenant to pay any of the bill owed to the utility by the landlord.

If the utility disconnects a household because it is not aware that the household is occupied by the tenant, and the landlord is responsible for payment of the utility bill, the utility must reinstate service upon notification from the tenant. Under such circumstances, the utility ~~shall~~may not require advance payment of any deposit, and the customer ~~shall~~must have the option of paying the deposit, if required, in three equal payments, with one-third due in ~~fifteen~~15 days, one-third due in ~~thirty~~30 days and one-third due in ~~sixty~~60 days.

- (1) A utility must provide notice to the property owner of residential rental property if utility service to the property has been disconnected, even if the tenant is the customer, for the purpose of promoting safety, the protection of property, and aid to tenants.
 - (a) Property owners must contact the utility to provide their contact information, and it is the property owner's responsibility to contact the utility to maintain up-to-date contact information. Utilities must retain contact information provided by property owners of residential rental locations.
 - (b) Property owners may authorize an appropriate third-party representative for notice and provide such contact information as the utility deems necessary. However, utilities may not impose any significant paperwork burden. A utility may reasonably request proof of ownership such as a copy of a deed or tax bill if the property owner is not otherwise known to the utility.
- (2) A utility must provide notice to a property owner once by phone, text, or email before 3:00 p.m. on the day of disconnection of gas, electric, or water service to any residential property for which the property owner has provided contact information for such purposes.
 - (a) The notice must not include any personally identifiable information about the tenant at the disconnected location, or the tenant's account if the tenant is the customer, except that the utility may disclose information necessary to enable the property owner or other applicable third party to reconnect utility service to the property.
 - (b) A utility may not disclose, sell, or transfer any personally identifying individual or aggregate data to a landlord or third-party property manager without the consent of the customer, unless otherwise provided for by law.
 - (c) Customer information that is specifically prohibited from disclosure includes customer names, telephone numbers, personally identifying electricity or gas account numbers, usage, and personally identifying payment history.
- (3) A follow-up written notice of disconnection of service(s) must be mailed to the property owner of any residential unit property within two business days of disconnection of gas, electric, or water service if the property owner and/or property manager has provided contact information and has requested written notice. This notice requirement may be satisfied if the utility contacts the

property owner by phone or electronically via email or SMS text message if the property owner consents to electronic delivery. The written notice must include:

- (a) The title of a utility representative with whom the property owner may make an inquiry or complaint. The contact information and business hours of the company representative(s) must also be included.
- (b) The address, telephone numbers (including the toll-free number), website, email address, and business hours for the Department of Public Service, Consumer Affairs and Public Information Division ("CAPI"). A statement must be included which explains that CAPI can help customers negotiate with utilities or assist with filing a dispute with the Public Utility Commission.
- (c) The itemized fees that may be charged to the property owner for the restoration of service. If a deposit may be required for restoration of service, then the utility must provide an explanation of how the amount will be calculated.
- (d) The notice provided pursuant to subparagraph (2) above must inform the property owner of the option to receive a follow-up written notice and that the additional notice may be subject to a reasonable fee.

(D) Budget Billing Plans. Each gas and electric utility ~~shall~~must offer budget payment plans to a customer at a primary residence, as defined in PUC Rule 3.201 in accordance with the following:

- (1) The plan ~~shall~~must be designed to reduce fluctuations in the ~~customer's~~customer's bills due to seasonal patterns of consumption and seasonal rates.
- (2) A customer may elect to participate in the budget billing plan at any time of year. A budget payment plan ~~shall~~must be based on the ~~customer's~~customer's recent twelve-month consumption, adjusted for known changes, including anticipated length of occupancy. If twelve months of billing data are not available for the customer, then twelve months of billing data for the premises ~~shall~~must be used. If ~~twelve~~12 months of billing data are not available for the premises, then the utility ~~shall~~must estimate the future consumption over the next ~~twelve~~12-month period. Each plan ~~shall provide~~must ensure that bills clearly identify consumption and state the amounts that would be due without budget billing.
- (3) The monthly payment due ~~shall~~must not exceed one-twelfth of the annual estimated bill, or the estimated average monthly amount for customers who expect to be in a dwelling for less than one year, as defined in subsection (D) (2) of this section. Between three and six months after the payment plan is initiated, the utility ~~shall~~must compare the payment plan bill with projected energy consumption and ~~shall~~must make adjustments necessary to minimize under- or over-payment by the customer. Between six and nine months after the payment plan is initiated, the utility may compare the payment plan with the projected energy consumption and if the difference exceeds 10% of the estimated annual consumption, the utility may adjust the monthly payment amount. Additionally, the utility ~~shall~~must reconcile a ~~customer's~~customer's budget payment plan ~~twelve~~12 months after initiating the ~~customer's~~customer's plan and annually thereafter either on the anniversary of the initiation of the plan or at a set time of the year as filed in the ~~utility's~~utility's tariff. If the amount of the deficit exceeds \$50, the customer ~~shall~~must have the option of paying any budget plan

- deficit in ~~twelve~~12 equal monthly installments during the ensuing 12 months.
- (4) Any customer who applies for the plan and has a delinquent balance ~~shall~~must have the right to pay the delinquency in an extended repayment plan concurrent with the budget plan.
 - (5) Any customer who applies for budget billing ~~shall~~must be informed in writing that any disputed terms or conditions for such a billing plan may be referred to the Consumer Affairs Division of the Department of Public Service. Notice to the customer ~~shall~~must include the ~~division's~~division's address and toll-free number.

- (E) Equal Treatment of Payments. A company ~~shall~~must treat all payments made by any person including the ~~ratepayer~~customer in the same manner unless the utility receives instructions to the contrary. ~~Payments shall~~must be applied toward the delinquent portion of the account before being applied to the current bill unless written instructions from the customer, a disputed bill, or payment arrangements require otherwise.
- (F) Household Rule. A company ~~shall~~must not disconnect or refuse service to a customer due to a delinquent bill owed by another person unless a person owing a delinquent bill, resulting from service to that household, resides in the same household.
- (G) Establishment of a Reasonable Repayment Plan. When establishing a reasonable repayment plan, the company ~~shall~~must consider the income and income schedule of the customer, if offered by the customer, the ~~customer's~~customer's payment history, the size of the arrearage and current bill, the amount of time and reason for the outstanding bill and whether the delinquency was caused by ~~unforeseen~~unforeseen circumstances.

3.303 Disconnection Notice Form

The notice form required under Section 3.302 and defined in Section 3.301 ~~shall~~must contain the following information:

- (A) a statement that the ~~ratepayer's~~customer's account is delinquent, a statement of the amount of the delinquency, and a statement that service will be disconnected unless:
 - (1) the delinquency is paid in full by a certain date; or
 - (2) the ~~ratepayer~~customer enters into a reasonable agreement with the utility to pay the delinquency by means of a repayment plan; or
 - (3) the ~~ratepayer~~customer denies the existence of any delinquency in excess of \$50.00, submits the dispute to the Commission, and the Commission advises the utility not to disconnect service; or
 - (4) the ~~ratepayer~~customer presents to the utility (or gives actual notice that he or she will, within seven days, present to the utility) a statement from a duly licensed physician certifying that disconnection will result in an immediate and serious health hazard to the ~~ratepayer~~customer or to a resident within the ~~ratepayer's~~customer's household, provided that use of ~~physician's~~a physician's certificate to prevent disconnection or to cause a reconnection is limited to two consecutive 30-day periods and ~~shall~~must not exceed three 30-day periods in any calendar year, except upon written order of the Commission;
- (B) the dates and times of day when the utility may disconnect service if the ~~ratepayer~~customer does not take appropriate action as described above;
- (C) a statement that the utility will negotiate a reasonable agreement for payment of the delinquency by means of a repayment plan and that if, after entering such negotiations, the ~~ratepayer~~customer does not believe the ~~utility's~~utility's terms to be reasonable, the ~~ratepayer~~customer may request the assistance of the Consumer Affairs Division of the Department of Public Service in conducting further negotiations;
- (D) the ~~name(s) or title(s), address(es), positions, addresses,~~ telephone ~~number(s)~~numbers and business hours of the company representatives with whom the ~~ratepayer~~customer may make any inquiry or complaint, and a statement that

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telephone calls made from within Vermont for such purposes may be made collect or toll-free;

~~purposes may be made collect or toll free;~~

- (E) the address, telephone numbers, including the toll-free number, and business hours of the Consumer Affairs Division of the Department of Public Service, and a statement that, in addition to providing assistance or advice as to negotiations with utilities, the Division can provide information as to how to submit to the Commission a dispute over the existence of a delinquency;
- (F) the itemized ~~cost~~fees that may be charged to the ~~ratepayers~~customer for the disconnection process including, those for notice, disconnection, collection, and later restoration of service and, if, No fees may be charged for remote disconnections. Fees may be charged for notice of disconnection to landlords or appropriate third parties, such as property managers. If a deposit may be required for restoration of service, an explanation of how the amount will be calculated must also be provided;
- (G) in the case of gas and electric utilities, if disconnection is to occur between November 1 and March 31, ~~(inclusive,)~~ a list as annually compiled and distributed by the Department of Public Service, of the names, addresses and telephone numbers of governmental and private agencies ~~which that~~ may provide assistance to ~~ratepayers~~customers in paying their utility bills;
- (H) in the case of gas and electric utilities, an offer to arrange a monthly installment plan for the payment of future bills, provided, that such offer need not be made if the account is for service at premises not used as a principal residence; ~~and~~
- (I) in the case of gas and electric utilities, a statement that service to households with any member aged 62 or older ~~shall~~must not be disconnected between November 1 and March 31 if outdoor temperatures are forecast to fall below 32 degrees Fahrenheit during a 48-hour period beginning at the anticipated time of disconnection, provided that the account holder furnishes advance written notice to the utility that the household qualifies under this paragraph and, if requested by the utility, furnishes reasonable proof of such qualification; ~~and~~
- ~~(J) A statement that utility services may be disconnected remotely, or at the pole or premises without a visit to the premises;~~
- ~~(K) A statement that the address, time, and date of disconnected utility services are reported to property owners, if the customer is not the property owner, when contact information for property owners is on file. Utilities must not use language in notices or messaging that could be construed as coercing payment by threatening to inform the landlord; and~~

~~(L)~~(L) any other information not inconsistent with the above and which has received prior approval of the Commission.

3.304 Winter Disconnections

No gas or electric utility may disconnect service to any residential ~~ratepayer~~customer between November 1 and March 31, ~~(inclusive,)~~ unless, in addition to complying with all other requirements of this rule, the utility has complied with the following:

- ~~(A) the utility shall make reasonable attempts to give the ratepayer actual oral notice of the information required by Section 3.303. If actual oral notice has not been given in any other manner, reasonable attempts shall consist of at least the following: three telephone calls made at least three hours apart to a telephone number provided by the~~

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Vermont
Public Utility Commission

Rule 3.300
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ratepayer for this purpose or, if no such number has been provided, to the ratepayer's number as it appears in the telephone directory or as obtained from directory assistance, and a personal visit to the premises at which service is provided. Actual oral notice given by one of these methods (telephone calls or personal visit) eliminates the need for further attempts by any other method.

- (1) The notice required by this paragraph may be given to either the ratepayer or to another responsible adult at the premises where service is to be disconnected.

~~(2) If actual oral notification has not otherwise been given, at least one of the telephone calls made to comply with this section shall be placed between the hours of 5:30 P.M. and 9:30 P.M. on a business day.~~

(A) The utility must make a reasonable attempt to orally contact the customer within 96 hours in advance of any planned disconnection. The utility may use alternative forms of communication such as text or email to satisfy the notice requirement. An additional contact (phone call, email, or SMS text message) must be made within 24 hours of a pending remote disconnection. One of these contacts must be made outside of typical business hours—for example, after 5:00 p.m. or before 8:00 a.m.

(1) The unavailability of a customer's telephone number excuses compliance with the requirement to attempt notification by telephone.

(2) A telephone call to a telephone not removed from service ~~which~~that results in a busy signal or in any other condition preventing communication, or an unanswered call ~~which~~that has not been allowed to ring for at least 60 seconds, shall not count toward satisfaction of the requirement of this section.

~~(4) The unavailability of a ratepayer's telephone number shall excuse compliance with the requirement to attempt notification by telephone.~~

~~(5) If no responsible adult is at the premises when a personal visit made in compliance with this paragraph occurs, a notice containing the information required by Section 3.303 shall be left in a secure and conspicuous place.~~

(3) When oral notification is given in compliance with this paragraph, in addition to giving the information required by Section 3.303, the utility ~~shall~~must advise the ~~ratepayer~~customer or other responsible adult ~~as the case may be,~~ that oral notification is not required to be given in connection with any subsequent disconnection ~~which~~that may occur during the same winter season, unless the ~~utility's~~utility's tariffs provide otherwise, except as required by remote disconnection. For any intended remote disconnection, even if previous oral notice has been given, the utility must make an additional contact (phone call, email, or SMS text) within 24 hours of a pending remote disconnection.

(B) If the utility is unable to reach the customer orally or does not receive confirmation of receipt of notice sent electronically via email or SMS text, the utility must make three additional attempts to contact the customer. These three attempts must be at least three hours apart, with one of these attempts made between the hours of 5:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. Unanswered calls must be allowed to ring for at least 60 seconds. Calls resulting in a busy signal do not count as one of the three required attempts. One of these three contacts (phone call, email, or text) must be made within 24 hours of a pending remote disconnection.

If, after complying with the requirements of subparagraph (A), actual oral notification has not been given, then, at least 48 hours before disconnection is to occur, the utility ~~shall~~must report to the Department of Public Service, in writing or by telephone, the ~~ratepayer's~~customer's name, address and, if available, telephone number. ~~The utility shall be prepared to provide a description of the observations of the person who attempted to give oral notice by personal visit as to whether the premises appear to be occupied.~~

(C) If the ~~ratepayer~~customer has been given actual oral notice during the current winter period with respect to a previous delinquency, compliance with subparagraphs (A) and (B) ~~shall~~is not ~~be~~ required, provided that the utility ~~shall deliver~~delivers or ~~mail~~mails to the premises at which service is to be disconnected

(with a copy mailed to the ~~ratepayer's~~customer's billing address if different) a notice containing the information required by Section 3.303. Delivery is complete (1) if made by personal service, upon actual delivery to the ~~ratepayer or his~~customer at the customer's premises at least 48 hours ~~prior to~~before the disconnection, not counting Vermont holidays, and (2) in the case of notice by mail, by deposit of the notice at any United States post office, postage prepaid, at least four days ~~prior to~~before to disconnection, not counting days when the postal service does not make regular deliveries of mail. An additional contact (phone call, email, or text) must be made within 24 hours of a pending remote disconnection regardless of whether actual oral notice was given previously during the current winter period. One of these contacts must be made outside of typical business hours—for example, after 5:00 p.m. or before 8:00 a.m.

- (C) (1) Prior to disconnection during the winter period, the utility ~~shall~~must confirm that outdoor temperatures, as predicted by a current National Weather Service (phone 802-862-2475) or on the internet at <https://www.weather.gov/btv/> forecast for the Burlington, ~~Vt.,~~Vermont area, or by another weather service approved by the Public Utility Commission, will not drop ~~under~~below 10 degrees Fahrenheit during a 48-hour period beginning between 7 a.m. and 10
- (D) :00 a.m. on the anticipated date of disconnection. When temperatures are forecast to fall below 10 degrees Fahrenheit during ~~the winter~~that period, the utility is prohibited from performing disconnections.
- (2) Utility service to households with any member aged 62 or older ~~shall~~must not be disconnected during the winter period if outdoor temperatures are forecast to fall

below 32 degrees Fahrenheit during a 48-hour period beginning between 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. on the anticipated date of disconnection, provided that the account holder furnishes advance written notice to the utility that the household qualifies under this paragraph. The utility may require reasonable proof of such qualification ~~under this subparagraph.~~

3.305 Notice Under Repayment Plan

- (A) Notwithstanding the provisions of 3.301(C), when a utility proposes to disconnect service because of a ~~ratepayer's customer's~~ failure to abide by the terms of a repayment plan it ~~shall~~must deliver or mail to the address at which service is to be disconnected (with a copy mailed to the ~~ratepayer's customer's~~ billing address if different) a notice containing the information required by Sections 3.303(A)(1) and 3.303(B). If made in person, delivery ~~shall~~must be effected at least 72 hours ~~prior to before~~ disconnection; if the notice is mailed, it ~~shall~~must be deposited in a United States post office at least five days ~~prior to before~~ disconnection. In lieu of giving written notice, the utility may give notice orally, in person or by telephone, ~~text, or email~~ at least 72 hours prior to disconnection. Substantial compliance with a repayment plan established under Section 3.307(B) or Section ~~3.302(B)(6) is demonstrated if the customer has paid at least 75% of each agreed-upon payment as due.~~
~~3.302 (B) (6) shall be demonstrated if the customer has paid at least 75 percent of each agreed-upon payment as due.~~
- (B) The manner of notice provided for in subparagraph (A) ~~shall~~will be sufficient, even in the case of disconnection by a gas or electric utility in the winter, provided that ~~such the~~ utility ~~shall have~~has given oral notice of the information contained in Section 3.303 at the time the repayment plan was entered into and provided the terms of the repayment plan were reasonable. ~~In addition to the requirements specified above, customers who are pending remote disconnection must be notified in writing via email or text within 48 hours of a pending remote disconnection. If a customer has not provided such contact information, a phone call must be made by utility staff within 48 hours of a pending remote disconnection. An additional contact (phone call, email, or text) must be made within 24 hours of a pending remote disconnection. One of these contacts must be made outside of typical business hours; for example, after 5:00 p.m. or before 8:00 a.m.~~
- (C) Disconnection resulting from failure to meet the terms of a repayment plan ~~shall~~must occur only after the utility has issued notice in accordance with Section 3.305(A).

3.306 Time and Notice of Disconnection

Disconnection of utility service ~~shall~~must occur only between the hours of 8:00 ~~A.M.~~a.m. and 2:00 ~~P.M.~~p.m. of the business day ~~when disconnected at a pole at or near the premises of the customer~~, specified on the notice of disconnection, or within four business days thereafter between April 1 and October 31, ~~(inclusive),~~ and within eight days thereafter between November 1 and March 31, ~~(inclusive; provided, however).~~ ~~However,~~ if a company has available personnel authorized to reconnect service and enter into arrangements on behalf of the utility until 8:00 ~~p.m. of a normal business day, the utility may disconnect service between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. When service is disconnected remotely, it may only occur between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. on a scheduled date of disconnection provided in the written notice as described previously.~~
~~P.M. of a normal business day, the utility may disconnect service between the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M.—~~
When service is disconnected at the premises of the ~~ratepayer~~customer, which ~~shall~~

~~include~~includes disconnection at a pole at or near the premises of the ~~ratepayer~~customer, the individual making the disconnection ~~shall~~must immediately inform a responsible adult on the premises that service has been disconnected, or if no responsible adult is then present, such individual ~~shall~~must leave on the premises in a conspicuous and secure place a notification advising that service has been disconnected and what the ~~ratepayer~~customer has to do to have service restored.

3.307 Restoration of Service

(A) If service has been disconnected, the company ~~shall within twenty-four hours must~~ restore service within 24 hours upon the ~~ratepayer's~~customer's request when the cause for disconnection of service has been removed ~~or~~, when an agreement has been reached between the ~~ratepayer~~customer and the company regarding the dispute ~~which~~that led to the disconnection, or when directed to do so by the Commission.

- (B) The company ~~shall~~must restore service if the disconnected customer pays one-half of the delinquent bill, or a lesser negotiated amount, before restoration and enters into a repayment plan to pay the balance over a minimum period of three months, except that the utility is not obligated to enter into more than two plans of this type with a particular customer within a calendar year.
- (C) Restoration of service, to the extent feasible, ~~shall~~must be done so as to avoid charging ~~ratepayers~~customers for overtime rates and other abnormal expenses.
- (D) A company ~~shall~~must not require prepayment of any non-recurring charges associated with disconnection and restoration of service as a condition of restoration of service. Such charges ~~shall~~must be paid within ~~thirty~~30 days unless part of a repayment agreement.
- (E) Upon receipt of a ~~Physician's Certificate~~physician's certificate, as defined in Section 3.301(D), the company ~~shall~~must reconnect service as soon as possible, but in no event longer than 24 hours.

3.308 **Filing Requirements**

- (A) Within ~~thirty~~60 days after the effective date of this rule, all companies subject to its provisions ~~shall~~must submit to the Commission for its review a copy of the disconnection notice form described in Section 3.303.
- (B) All gas, electric, and telephone utilities subject to this rule ~~shall~~must file monthly with the Commission, on a form provided by the Commission, a statement reporting the following information regarding residential service for the previous month: the number of bills forwarded to ~~ratepayers~~customers, the number of disconnection notices sent, the number of actual disconnections, the number of reconnections made within 15 days of disconnection, the number of repayment plans entered into, the number of repayment plans that were broken, and the dollar amount of delinquencies for which disconnections were made.
- (C) Companies that fail to file information required in Section 3.308(B) within six months of the month being reported ~~shall~~beare precluded from disconnecting any residential customers.
- ~~(D)~~ Within ~~120~~60 days of the effective date of revisions to this rule, each utility ~~shall~~must file tariff amendments to ensure that they are consistent with the provisions of this rule.
- ~~(D)~~(E) To prevent unnecessary hardship or delay, to prevent injustice, or for other good cause, companies may petition the Commission for an extension of the filing requirement deadlines included in paragraphs (A) and (D) of this section.

3.400 DISCONNECTION OF CABLE TELEVISION SERVICE AND NON-RESIDENTIAL ELECTRIC, GAS, AND WATER SERVICE**3.401 Definitions**

The following definitions apply to Rule 3.400:

- (A) Aggregate Data: Customer account information from which all identifying information has been removed such that the data or information cannot be associated with a given customer without extraordinary effort.
- (B) Business Days: Monday through Thursday, excluding Vermont legal holidays and any other time, or the day before such time, when a company's business offices are not open to the public.
- (C) Delinquency: Failure of the customer to tender payment for a valid bill within thirty days from the verifiable transmittal of the bill. The "due date" must be printed on the bill. Should the utility intend to have failure to tender payment by the "due date" establish delinquency instead, the "due date" must be at least 30 days from transmittal of the bill.
- (D) Disconnection: The serving utility's intentional termination of a customer's utility service by any methods such as remotely via advanced metering infrastructure or physically on premises or at the pole. Disconnection includes interruption or limitation of service but does not include cessation of service made at the request of or with the permission of the customer or interruptions of service that are necessary for maintenance or repairs conducted by the utility.
- (E) Notice: Written notice of disconnection that is provided to the customer on a form approved by the Commission, except where otherwise provided, or by electronic notice, mailed or electronically transmitted within 40 days after delinquency but not more than 20 days, nor less than 14 days, prior to the first date on which disconnection of service, whether remote or on premises, may occur. If payment has been made by a check or other instrument that is subsequently dishonored, then the number of days between delivery to the utility of the dishonored instrument and receipt by the utility of the notice of dishonor may be deducted from the minimum number of days before the disconnection that notice must be sent, but in no event may that minimum number of days be less than four.
- (F) Payment of Bill: Receipt at the company's business office or authorized payment agency of cash or of a check or other instrument that is subsequently honored.
- (G) Transmit: An act of the utility to convey any document, bill, or notice to a customer. Transmittal may be accomplished through verifiable means such as postal mail, in-person visits, or electronic transfer. Electronic transfer may include email, text message, app click-through, and other routine electronic message platforms.

3.402 General Rule

Except at the request of the customer or upon order of the Commission, no utility may disconnect cable television service or non-residential gas, electric, or water service unless payment of a valid bill or charge is delinquent as defined herein and notice of disconnection has been provided previously to the customer.

- (A) This rule does not apply to any disconnection or interruption of services made necessary for reasons of health or of safety of the customer or the general public.
- (B) Disconnection is not permitted if the delinquency is due solely to a disputed portion of a charge that has been referred to the Commission by the customer or the utility, and the Commission has advised the utility not to disconnect service.
- (C) Any utility may elect, at its option, to offer an extended repayment plan for delinquent bills and/or a budget plan for future bills to customers covered by this rule.
- (D) A utility must provide notice to the property owner of a rental property if utility service to the property has been disconnected, even if the tenant is the customer, for the purpose of promoting safety, protection of property, and aid to tenants.
 - (1) Property owners must contact the utility to provide their contact information, and it is the property owner's responsibility to contact the utility to maintain up-to-date contact information. Utilities must retain contact information provided by property owners of rental locations.
 - (2) Property owners may authorize an appropriate third-party representative for notice and provide such contact information as the utility deems necessary. However, utilities may not impose any significant paperwork burden. A utility may reasonably request proof of ownership such as a copy of a deed or tax bill if the property owner is not otherwise known to the utility.
 - (3) A utility must provide notice to a property owner once by phone, text, or email before to 3:00 p.m. on the day of disconnection of gas, electric, or water utility service to any rental property for which the property owner has provided contact information for such purposes.
 - (a) The notice must not include any personally identifiable information about the tenant at the disconnected location, or the tenant's account if the tenant is the customer, except that the utility may disclose information necessary to enable the property owner or other applicable third party to reconnect utility service to the property.
 - (b) A utility may not disclose, sell, or transfer any personally identifying individual or aggregate data to a landlord or third-party property manager without the consent of the customer, unless otherwise provided by law.
 - (c) Customer information that is specifically prohibited from disclosure includes customer names, telephone numbers, personally identifying electricity or gas account numbers, usage, and personally identifying

payment history.

- (4) A follow-up written notice of disconnection of service(s) must be mailed to the property owner of any rental property within two business days of disconnection of gas, electric, or water service if the property owner and/or property manager has provided contact information and has requested written notice. This notice requirement may be satisfied if the utility contacts the property owner by phone or electronically via email or SMS text message if the property owner consents to electronic delivery. The written notice must include:
- (a) The title of a utility representative with whom the property owner may make an inquiry or complaint. The contact information and business hours of the company representative(s) must also be included.
 - (b) The address, telephone numbers (including the toll-free number), website, email address, and business hours for the Department of Public Service, Consumer Affairs and Public Information Division ("CAPI"). A statement must be included which explains that CAPI can help customers negotiate with utilities or assist with filing a dispute with the Public Utility Commission.
 - (c) The itemized fees that may be charged to the property owner for the restoration of service. If a deposit may be required for restoration of service, then the utility must provide an explanation of how the amount will be calculated.
 - (d) The notice provided pursuant to subsection (3) above must inform the property owner of the option to receive a follow-up written notice.

3.403 Disconnection Notice Form

The notice form required under Section 3.402, and defined in Section 3.401, must contain at least the following information:

- (A) a statement that the customer's account is delinquent, a statement of the amount of the delinquency, and a statement that service will be disconnected unless: (1) the delinquency is paid in full by a certain date; (2) the customer submits any disputed portion of the charge to the Commission and the Commission orders the utility not to disconnect service; or (3) if the utility offers an extended repayment plan for delinquent bills, the customer enters into such a plan;
- (B) the dates and times of day when the utility may disconnect service if the customer does not take any of the actions as described in Section 3.403(A) above;
- (C) the positions, addresses, telephone numbers, and business hours of company representatives with whom the customer may discuss the delinquency or to whom the customer may make an inquiry or complaint;
- (D) the address, telephone numbers, including the toll-free number, and business hours of the Consumer Affairs Division of the Department of Public Service, and a

statement that, in addition to providing assistance or advice, the Division can provide information as to how to submit to the Commission a dispute over the existence of a delinquency;

- (E) The itemized fees that may be charged to the customer for the disconnection process, including those for notice, disconnection, collection, and restoration of service. No fees may be charged for remote disconnection of electric, natural gas, or water service. Fees may be charged for notice of disconnection to landlords or appropriate third parties, such as property managers. If a deposit may be required for restoration of service, an explanation of how the amount will be calculated must also be provided; and
- (F) A statement that utility services may be disconnected remotely, or at the pole or premises without a visit to the premises;
- (G) A statement that the address, time, and date of disconnected utility services are reported to property owners, if the customer is not the property owner, when contact information for property owners is on file. Utilities must not use language in notices or messaging that could be construed as coercing payment by threatening to inform the landlord; and
- (H) any other information not inconsistent with the above and which has received prior approval of the Commission.

3.404 Time and Notice of Disconnection

Disconnection of utility service must occur only between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. of the business day when disconnected at a pole at or near the premises of the customer, specified on the notice of disconnection, or within four business days thereafter. However, if a company has available personnel authorized to reconnect service and enter into arrangements on behalf of the utility until 8:00 p.m. of a normal business day, the utility may disconnect service between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. When service is disconnected remotely, it may only occur between the hours of 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. on a scheduled date of disconnection provided in the written notice as described previously.

When service is disconnected or interrupted at the premises of the customer, which must include disconnection or interruption at a pole at or near the premises of the customer, the individual making the disconnection must immediately inform a responsible adult on the premises that service has been disconnected or interrupted, or if no responsible adult is then present, must leave on the premises in a conspicuous and secure place a notification advising that service has been disconnected or interrupted and what the customer has to do to have service restored.

3.405 Restoration of Service

If service has been disconnected or interrupted, the company must restore service within 24 hours upon the customer's request when the cause for disconnection of service has been removed, when an agreement has been reached between the customer and the company regarding the dispute that led to the disconnection, or when directed to do so by the Commission. Restoration of service, to the extent feasible, must be done so as to avoid charging customers for overtime wages and other unusual expenses.

3.406 Filing Requirements

- (A) Within 60 days after the effective date of this rule, all utilities subject to its provisions must submit to the Commission for its review a copy of its disconnection notice form.
- (B) Within 60 days of the effective date of revisions to this rule, each utility must file tariff amendments to ensure that they are consistent with the provisions of this rule.
- (C) To prevent unnecessary hardship or delay, to prevent injustice, or for other good cause, companies may petition the Commission for an extension of the filing requirement deadlines included in paragraphs (A) and (B) of this section.

3.407 Cable Television Service Exemptions

Utilities are not required to comply with requirements of Sections 3.402(D) and 3.403(G) of this rule for the disconnection of cable television services.

3.400 DISCONNECTION OF CABLE TELEVISION SERVICE AND NON-RESIDENTIAL ELECTRIC, GAS, AND WATER SERVICE

3.401 Definitions

The following definitions apply to Rule 3.400:

- (A) Disconnection: deliberate interruption or disconnection of utility service to a ratepayer by the serving utility, not including disconnection at the request of or with the permission of the ratepayer.
- (A) Aggregate Data: customer account information from which all identifying information has been removed such that the data or information cannot be associated with a given customer without extraordinary effort.
- (B) Business Days: Monday through Thursday, excluding Vermont legal holidays and any other time, or the day before such time, when a company's business offices are not open to the public.
- (C) Delinquency: ~~failure~~ Failure of the ~~ratepayer~~customer to tender payment for a valid bill ~~or charge~~ (1) within thirty days ~~from the verifiable transmittal of the postmark date of that bill or charge, or~~ (2) by a ". The "due date" at least thirty days after mailing, which shall" must be printed on the bill ~~and which shall control in. Should the absence~~utility intend to have failure to tender payment by the "due date" establish delinquency instead, the "due date" must be at least 30 days from transmittal of the bill.
- (B)(D) Disconnection: the serving utility's intentional termination of a ~~postmark~~customer's utility service by any methods such as remotely via advanced metering infrastructure or physically on premises or at the pole. Disconnection includes interruption or limitation of service but does not include cessation of service made at the request of or with the permission of the customer or interruptions of service that are necessary for maintenance or repairs conducted by the utility.
- (C)(E) Notice: ~~except where otherwise provided or where the context otherwise requires, notice shall mean~~ Notice: written notice of disconnection that is provided to the customer on a form approved by the Commission, ~~except where otherwise provided, or by electronic notice, mailed or delivered electronically transmitted~~ within ~~forty~~40 days after delinquency; but not more than ~~twenty~~20 days, nor less than ~~fourteen~~14 days ~~—seven if the ratepayer has failed to abide by the terms of an extended repayment plan—~~, prior to the first date on which disconnection of service. ~~Where, whether remote or on premises, may occur. If~~ payment has been made by a check or other instrument ~~which that~~ is subsequently dishonored, then the number of days between delivery to the utility of the dishonored instrument and receipt by the utility of the notice of dishonor may be deducted from the minimum number of days ~~prior to before the~~ disconnection that notice must be sent, but in no event may that minimum number of days be less than four.
- (D)(F) Payment of Bill: receipt at the ~~company's~~company's business office or authorized payment agency of cash or of a check or other instrument ~~which that~~ is subsequently honored.
- (E) Business Days: ~~Monday through Thursday, excluding Vermont legal holidays and any other time, or the day before such time, when the Company's business offices are not open to the public.~~

(G) Transmit: an act of the utility to convey any document, bill, or notice to a customer. Transmittal may be accomplished through verifiable means such as postal mail, in-person visits, or electronic transfer. Electronic transfer may include email, text message, app click-through, and other routine electronic message platforms.

3.402 **General Rule**

Except at the request of the ~~ratepayer~~customer or upon order of the Commission, no utility ~~shall~~may disconnect cable television service or non-residential gas, electric, or water service unless payment of a valid bill or charge is delinquent as defined herein, and notice of disconnection has been provided previously to the ~~ratepayer~~customer.

- (A) This rule ~~shall~~does not apply to any disconnection or interruption of services made necessary for reasons of health or of safety of the ~~ratepayer~~customer or the general public.
- (B) Disconnection ~~shall~~is not ~~be~~ permitted if the delinquency is due solely to a disputed portion of a charge ~~which~~that has been referred to the Commission by the ~~ratepayer~~customer or the utility, and the Commission has advised the utility not to disconnect service.
- (C) Any utility may elect, at its option, to offer an extended repayment plan for delinquent bills and/or a budget plan for future bills to ~~ratepayers~~customers covered by this rule.

- (D) A utility must provide notice to the property owner of a rental property if utility service to the property has been disconnected, even if the tenant is the customer, for the purpose of promoting safety, protection of property, and aid to tenants.
- (1) Property owners must contact the utility to provide their contact information, and it is the property owner's responsibility to contact the utility to maintain up-to-date contact information. Utilities must retain contact information provided by property owners of rental locations.
- (2) Property owners may authorize an appropriate third-party representative for notice and provide such contact information as the utility deems necessary. However, utilities may not impose any significant paperwork burden. A utility may reasonably request proof of ownership such as a copy of a deed or tax bill if the property owner is not otherwise known to the utility.
- (3) A utility must provide notice to a property owner once by phone, text, or email before to 3:00 p.m. on the day of disconnection of gas, electric, or water utility service to any rental property for which the property owner has provided contact information for such purposes.
- (a) The notice must not include any personally identifiable information about the tenant at the disconnected location, or the tenant's account if the tenant is the customer, except that the utility may disclose information necessary to enable the property owner or other applicable third party to reconnect utility service to the property.
- (b) A utility may not disclose, sell, or transfer any personally identifying individual or aggregate data to a landlord or third-party property manager without the consent of the customer, unless otherwise provided by law.
- (c) Customer information that is specifically prohibited from disclosure includes customer names, telephone numbers, personally identifying electricity or gas account numbers, usage, and personally identifying payment history.
- (4) A follow-up written notice of disconnection of service(s) must be mailed to the property owner of any rental property within two business days of disconnection of gas, electric, or water service if the property owner and/or property manager has provided contact information and has requested written notice. This notice requirement may be satisfied if the utility contacts the property owner by phone or electronically via email or SMS text message if the property owner consents to electronic delivery. The written notice must include:
- (a) The title of a utility representative with whom the property owner may make an inquiry or complaint. The contact information and business hours of the company representative(s) must also be included.
- (b) The address, telephone numbers (including the toll-free number), website, email address, and business hours for the Department of Public Service, Consumer Affairs and Public Information Division ("CAPI"). A statement must be included which explains that CAPI can help customers negotiate with utilities or assist with filing a dispute with the Public Utility Commission.
- (c) The itemized fees that may be charged to the property owner for the

restoration of service. If a deposit may be required for restoration of service, then the utility must provide an explanation of how the amount will be calculated.

(d) The notice provided pursuant to subsection (3) above must inform the property owner of the option to receive a follow-up written notice.

3.403 Disconnection Notice Form

The notice form required under Section 3.402, and defined in Section 3.401, ~~shall~~must contain at least the following information:

- (A) a statement that the ~~ratepayer's~~customer's account is delinquent, a statement of the amount of the delinquency, and a statement that service will be disconnected unless: (1) the delinquency is paid in full by a certain date; (2) the ~~ratepayer~~customer submits any disputed portion of the charge to the Commission and the Commission orders the utility not to disconnect service; or (3) if the utility offers an extended repayment plan for delinquent bills, the ~~ratepayer~~customer enters into such a plan;
- (B) the dates and times of day when the utility may disconnect service if the ~~ratepayer~~customer does not take any of the actions as described in Section 3.403(A) above;
- (C) the ~~names or~~ positions, addresses, telephone numbers and business hours of company representatives with whom the ~~ratepayer~~customer may discuss the delinquency or to whom the ~~ratepayer~~customer may make an inquiry or complaint;
- (D) the address, telephone numbers, including the toll-free number, and business hours of the Consumer Affairs Division of the Department of Public Service, and a statement that, in addition to providing assistance or advice, the Division can provide information as to how to submit to the Commission a dispute over the existence of a delinquency;
- ~~(E) the~~The itemized ~~cost~~fees that may be charged to the ~~ratepayer~~customer for the disconnection process, including those for notice, disconnection, collection, and later restoration of service and, if, No fees may be charged for remote disconnection of electric, natural gas, or water service. Fees may be charged for notice of disconnection to landlords or appropriate third parties, such as property managers. If a deposit may be required for restoration of service, an explanation of how the amount will be calculated must also be provided; and
- ~~(F)~~ A statement that utility services may be disconnected remotely, or at the pole or premises without a visit to the premises;
- ~~(E)~~(G) A statement that the address, time, and, date of disconnected utility services are reported to property owners, if the customer is not the property owner, when contact information for property owners is on file. Utilities must not use language in notices or messaging that could be construed as coercing payment by threatening to inform the landlord; and
- ~~(F)~~(H) any other information not inconsistent with the above and which has received prior approval of the Commission.

3.404 Time and Notice of Disconnection

Disconnection of utility service ~~shall~~must occur only between the hours of 8:00 ~~A.M.~~a.m. and 2:00 ~~P.M.~~p.m. of the business day when disconnected at a pole at or near the premises of the

~~customer~~, specified on the notice of disconnection, or within four business days thereafter;
~~provided, however. However,~~ if a company has available personnel authorized to
reconnect service and enter into arrangements on behalf of the utility until 8:00 ~~P.M.p.m.~~ of
a normal business day, the utility may disconnect service between the hours of 8:00
~~A.M.a.m.~~ and 5:00 ~~P.M.p.m.~~ When service is disconnected remotely, it may only occur
between the hours of 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. on a scheduled date of disconnection provided in
the written notice as described previously.

When service is disconnected or interrupted at the premises of the ~~ratepayercustomer~~,
which ~~shall~~must include disconnection or interruption at a pole at or near the premises of
the ~~ratepayercustomer~~, the individual making the disconnection ~~shall~~must immediately
inform a responsible adult on the premises that service has been disconnected or
interrupted, or if no responsible adult is then present, ~~shall~~must leave on the premises in a
conspicuous and secure place a notification advising that service has been disconnected
or interrupted and what the ~~ratepayercustomer~~ has to do to have service restored.

3.405 **Restoration of Service**

If service has been disconnected or interrupted, the company ~~shall within twenty-four~~
~~hours must~~ restore service within 24 hours upon the ~~ratepayer'scustomer's~~ request when
the cause for disconnection of service has been removed, when an agreement has been
reached between the ~~ratepayercustomer~~ and the company regarding the dispute ~~which that~~
led to the disconnection, or when directed to do so by the Commission. Restoration of
service, to the extent feasible, must be done so as to avoid charging customers for overtime
wages and other unusual expenses.

~~Commission. Restoration of service, to the extent feasible, shall be done so as to avoid charging ratepayers for overtime wages and other abnormal expenses.~~

3.406 Filing Requirements

- (A) Within ~~thirty~~60 days after the effective date of this rule, all utilities subject to its provisions ~~shall~~must submit to the Commission for its review a copy of its disconnection notice form.

(B) Within 60 days of the effective date of revisions to this rule, each utility must file tariff amendments to ensure that they are consistent with the provisions of this rule.

(C) To prevent unnecessary hardship or delay, to prevent injustice, or for other good cause, companies may petition the Commission for an extension of the filing requirement deadlines included in paragraphs (A) and (B) of this section.

3.407 Cable Television Service Exemptions

Utilities are not required to comply with requirements of Sections 3.402(D) and 3.403(G) of this rule for the disconnection of cable television services.

PUC Case No. 17-4999-INV - SERVICE LIST

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